

Specification

**FILE MANAGEMENT OF ONE-TIME-PROGRAMMABLE NONVOLATILE
MEMORY DEVICES**

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates generally to methods and apparatus for managing files stored within and read from one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices and particularly to manipulating file managers for keeping track of the location of files stored within such one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices.

Description of the Prior Art

Storage of digital information is continuously enjoying improvement and advancements in terms its rate of performance for storage and retrieval as technology advances. As an example, digital cameras, which have become commonplace in the field of photography employ nonvolatile memory devices (devices requiring erasure of information prior to re-writing of information) for storing and retrieving captured photos of images. Similarly, archival of information is an application for nonvolatile memory devices. More recently, one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices have found their way for use by digital cameras and archives.

The problem posed by one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices is clearly the inability to re-program them. That is, once an area of memory has been written thereto, it cannot be re-written. This is precisely the reason for their natural use in archival of information.

Generally, archived information requires a one-time writing or programming. The same applies to the application of one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices to disposable digital films. Upon storage of a number of photos of images, the disposable film is developed and disposed thereof.

5 The management of information, i.e. digital data, within any of these systems need be performed to maintain track of the location of the stored information. Generally, these systems include a controller device coupled to the one-time-programmable memory and to a host for directing the storage of information to particular areas within the one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory. The actual or user data is generally stored in a location identified for this
10 purpose typically referred to as the file area and information regarding the location of the file area is kept in a separate location referred to as the system area. The file and system areas are both stored in one-time programmable nonvolatile memory. The problem that arises is successful manipulation of the system area to manage the data area. For example, when power is temporarily disconnected and re-established, the controller must know where there is free or
15 available memory to write new information within the one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory and thus must restore information regarding the location of information within the latter.

Thus, the need arises for a system and method for managing or manipulating digital information stored and read from one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Briefly, an embodiment of the present invention includes a digital equipment system comprising a host for sending commands to read or write files having sectors of information, each sector having and being modifiable on a bit-by-bit, byte-by-byte or word-by-word basis. The host being operative to receive responses to the commands. The digital equipment further
25 including a controller device responsive to the commands and including one-time-programmable

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nonvolatile memory for storing information organized into sectors, based on commands received from the host, and upon commands from the host to re-write a sector, the controller device for re-writing said sector on a bit-by-bit, byte-by-byte or word-for-word basis.

The foregoing and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be 5 apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments which make reference to several figures of the drawing.

IN THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows an example of a layout 10 of a file system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

10 Fig. 2 shows a shows an example of a FAT entry 30.

Fig. 3 illustrates a digital equipment system 50 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 4 shows an example of the structure of data including defects pursuant to an embodiment of the present invention.

15 Fig. 5 shows an example of a block structure 80 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 6 illustrates an example of another embodiment of the present invention.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to Fig. 1, an example of a layout 10 of a file system is shown to include a system area 12 and a data area 14 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The system area 12 is for storing information pertaining to the organization of the information 5 stored or to be stored in the data area 14.

Within the system area 12 is included an area 16 for maintaining the Original Engineering Manufacturer (OEM) identification/Bidirectional Input/Output System (BIOS), an area 18 for maintaining a File Allocation Table (FAT) 1, an area 20 for maintaining a FAT 2, an area 22 for maintaining root disk directory information and an area 24 for maintaining the file 10 area. All of the areas 16-24 are stored within a one-time-programmable memory device. As previously described, such a memory can be programmed only once in any of its given locations and thus cannot be erased and reprogrammed again. The challenge posed, which is resolved by the present invention, is to manipulate the information or data stored within the area 24 by using the information stored within and read from the system area 12.

15 In one embodiment of the present invention, it is further important to maintain the layout 10 of Fig. 1 in order to ensure backward compatibility of the methods and teachings of the present invention with that of prior art systems, as file system structures generally employ such a layout. In fact, one type of file system, such as a DOS-compatible file system, must follow that 20 of the layout 10 of Fig. 1. Digital equipment, such as digital cameras, uses DOS structure file systems to store digital photos (or files) into storage devices.

In Fig. 1, the FAT1 and 2 each indicate how the file area 24 is allocated. The root disk directory includes a fixed number of directory entries. The file area 24 includes data files (in the case of digital cameras, this is the area in which digital photos are maintained) and subdirectory files and free data sectors available for storage therein. These areas are divided into a block of 25 sectors accessible by a host, discussed in further detail below. In one embodiment of the present

invention, these areas are typically of fixed size depending on the capacity of the media. The data in the file area 24 are organized in clusters with each cluster including a predetermined number of sectors, such as 1, 2, 4, 8, 16 or any other integer number of sectors.

The FAT 1 and 2 each include one entry per cluster. Within each entry in the FAT, there

5 is stored a link value pointing to the next location within the cluster in which data is located. An example of this is found in Fig. 2. Fig. 2 shows an example of a FAT entry 30 within one of its sectors. Each of the locations 32 – 48 points to a cluster within the file area 24 of Fig. 1. For example, at location 36, which is the beginning or start-of-file for “File1.txt”, the linked value is

10 ‘0003’, which is the location within the FAT entry 30 where the next location of the data within the file area 24 for the file File1.txt is located. At location ‘0003’ or location 38, the link value is ‘0004’ pointing to the next location and so on. The end-of-file for File1.txt is at location 40 where the value “FFFF” appears denoting the end-of-file although any other value can be used to denote the end of file. The beginning or start of the “File2.txt” is at location 42 where the link value is ‘0006’ pointing to the next location within the entry 30 and the ‘0006’ points to ‘0007’,

15 which ultimately points to an end-of-file value for “File2.txt”. The value ‘0000’ indicates a free or available cluster.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the identification of the end-of-file is important during power-up. That is, after a power interruption and upon power-up, the system must know where it can store new information such as a digital photograph or file. In doing so,

20 the end-of-file is identified by a flag or a predetermined value, as ‘FFFF’ and the location following the location in which the end-of-file resides is identified as the location for the start-of-file of a new file to be stored.

In prior art digital cameras used today, since one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices are not utilized, rather, nonvolatile memory devices that are erasable for re-programming are utilized, the size of each file (or picture) is a different size and the media or

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memory can be easily modified to account for the various picture sizes. Pictures are stored onto the media and the FAT areas are updated at times when pictures (or files) are stored onto the system. Accordingly, a sector, which is a group of storage locations, within a FAT1 or FAT2 is modified more than once when one or more pictures are stored onto the media. It should be noted

5 that a sector includes more than one bit and/or byte of information and when a picture is stored, while all of the bits or bytes of the sector may not be modified, prior art methods and techniques nevertheless modify an entire sector of information within memory or the media.

In the present invention however, due to the use of one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices, a sector cannot be erased and reprogrammed every time a host updates or

10 modifies the sector, i.e. a picture is stored. Thus, the present invention must avoid reprogramming of a sector every time the host updates the same.

This is accomplished by the methods and teachings of the present invention in one of two distinct methods. First, in order for the media to be backward compatible with the present file system, a controller device is utilized to accomplish this task by keeping a correlation between

15 logical addresses and physical addresses and also by maintaining track of defective blocks, a block including one or more sectors of information. Logical addresses are host-generated addresses for identifying sectors to be accessed by the controller. Physical addresses are addresses identifying sectors within the one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory device.

Use of one-time-programmable devices entails a relationship between logical addresses and physical addresses that is one-to-one except for blocks/sectors that are deemed defective. In

20 one embodiment of the present invention, a bit, byte or word, where a byte and word are each one or more bits, is programmed rather than an entire sector when a picture (or file) is stored. Thus, the controller maintains track of all of the sectors that are requested to be written by the host and if the host modifies or updates the file manager sectors, such as FAT1, FAT2 and/or the

25 root directory sectors in the case of a file management system such as DOS, as depicted in Fig. 1

herein, the controller compares the sectors to be programmed (or written) to that which is actually stored in the media and identifies the byte which is modified within the sector to be written and only programs those bits, bytes or words in the media which are modified and reside within the same physical location. This is perhaps best understood with reference to a block 5 diagram.

Referring now to Fig. 3, a digital equipment system 50 is shown to include a host 52 coupled to a controller device 54 through a data bus 56 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The host 52 commands the controller device 54, via the data bus 56, to store pictures or files within a media or one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory and later may 10 request to read such information again through the data bus 56.

The controller device 54, in Fig. 3, is shown to include a buffer 60, an address pointer 62, a comparator 64, a buffer 66, an address pointer 68, a media device 70 and a media device 72, a microprocessor 74, a register 76, a Random Access Memory (RAM) device 78 and a media state machine 80. The buffer 60 is shown coupled to the comparator 64. Also shown coupled to the 15 comparator 64 is the buffer 66. The address pointer 62 is shown coupled to the buffer 60 and the address pointer 68 is shown coupled to the buffer 66. The buffer is also shown coupled to the media devices 70 and 72. While not shown explicitly in Fig. 3 in the interest of avoiding confusion, the microprocessor 74 executes a program for controlling the blocks depicted within the controller device 54. The program the microprocessor 74 executes resides within the RAM 20 device 78. The media state machine 80, in part, controls the addressing of the media devices 70 and 72. The buffer 66 directs information to be stored and read from the media devices 70 and 72. The latter are one-time-programmable nonvolatile memory devices for storing pictures and/or files depending on the application of the system 50.

In operation, the buffer 60 receives commands from the host 52 to read or program 25 information into the media devices 70 and 72. Each time such an access is commanded by the Lexar-0080US

host to be performed by the controller device 54, certain sectors are identified for such access using the logical addressing discussed hereinabove. Using this sector information or a derivation thereof, which is at some point in time stored in the buffer 60 of Fig. 3, the comparator compares a sector to be modified or accessed by the host with those sectors to which information has been 5 previously written. This is performed by a comparison operation by the comparator 64 between the contents of the buffer 60 and the contents of the buffer 66. In fact, this comparison operation is performed on a bit-by-bit, byte-by-byte or word-by-word basis and only those bits, bytes or words, which need to be modified due to the soon-to-be stored information, are modified. This is referred to as partial programming since only a bit, byte or word is modified rather than an 10 entire sector. The buffer 66 receives its information from the media devices 70 and 72.

It is also possible to keep certain number of spare locations for the system area 12 of Fig. 1 particularly if the partial programming is limited. In this case, these sectors can be mapped to the spare sectors by the controller. Use of spare sectors allows for actual address mapping rather than a one-to-one correspondence between logical and physical addresses as noted above. Also, 15 to allow for backward compatibility with DOS-like file systems, files that are of variable length need be accommodated.

In other forms of data storage using solid state or nonvolatile one-time-programmable devices where a new file manager can be incorporated, the controller/host system nevertheless need to keep track of the addressing and defect blocks and the file locations, such as start and 20 end-of-file and the start of the next file. In one scenario, the defect management can be accomplished in byte or word up to sector or block resolution. If the resolution is small as a byte or word, the controller or host maps the data in a form of a table where those locations that are defective are identified and saved so that they can be skipped over during programming. An example of the structure of data including defects is shown in Fig. 4.

When defect handling is performed, the controller or host map the defective locations into another location that is free of defects. The start and end-of-file are identified in a one-time-programmable media since data is in contiguous format, such as block 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, ... and saved accordingly. The start and end-of-file are saved and the defective block is skipped by using a

5 simple identifier to identify the defective block, such as a flag or a predetermined value or an address. Fig. 5 shows an example of a block structure 80 including a start-of-file location 84 and an end-of-file location 86 and a defective sector location 82, the latter of which is skipped over when writing to sectors 0 – 6. The information that was to be written to the defective sector is instead written to a location in a spare area in the system area.

10 In the case of a one-to-one address relationship, a defective sector/block can point to a spare location where it is replaced by the spare location. This requires that the defective sector/block have enough usable bytes where the location of the redirected sector can be saved. For the purpose of the integrity of the saved address, the controller should employ a unique method to guarantee the value saved in the spare location. This method can be programming the

15 address in the defective sector in multiple locations and when accessed, the locations will be compared to validate the correct address.

An example 100 of another embodiment of the present invention will be explained with reference to Fig. 6. In the event of a power failure, some of the data stored within certain locations of the one-time programmable nonvolatile memory may be corrupted. Upon power restoration, the system needs to recognize the occurrence of a power failure so that a file that includes corrupted data will be identified as an invalid file and following files will be stored at a valid location not adversely affected by power failures.

In order to recognize that a particular sector is corrupt, the system verifies the error correction code (ECC) associated with the particular sector, if the ECC indicates that the

25 particular sector or any portions thereof is corrupt, the next sector is read.

Additionally, the system continues to check for an end-of-file identifier to determine whether or not the file has been properly written and that the ECC error is due to grown error(s) rather than power failure related errors. If there is no start-of-file identifier at a location following the corrupt sector or there is no end-of-file in the rest of the media, such location can 5 be identified as a corrupt sector due to power failure and designated accordingly so as to prevent future storage of information therein.

If the particular sector has been determined to be corrupted, the next sector is read and if all of the data in the next sector is in a non-programmable state, i.e. all 0's or all 1's, and/or the ECC associated with the next sector indicates error, then it is determined that the end-of-file has 10 been reached. Alternatively, to check for end-of-file more thoroughly, the sector following the next sector is read and the same criteria is implemented, i.e. a determination is made as to whether all of the data in the sector is in a non-programmable state and/or the sector-associated ECC indicates an error and based upon the outcome, a determination is made as to whether or not the end-of-file is reached.

15 Additionally, when there are more than one power failures in a media, there may be more than one corrupted sector and thus the system must verify all locations and where new file locations are started and ended. In other words, the system can maintain a table of corrupted files in a spare area so that after power-up, the system can identify and map the corrupted files thereby preventing their use for future storage.

20 Illustratively, in Fig. 6, the start-of-file is designated at sector 0 at 102 and remaining sectors of the file are stored in following sector locations, such as sector 1 104 and sector 2 106. However the next sector location, sector 3 108 has been adversely affected or corrupted by a power failure, thus, a new file will be stored starting from 110.

25 Although the present invention has been described in terms of specific embodiments it is anticipated that alterations and modifications thereof will no doubt become apparent to those

skilled in the art. It is therefore intended that the following claims be interpreted as covering all such alterations and modification as fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is: